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Sequencing Ceasefire Agreements: First, Last or in the Middle? (<http://www.politicalsettlements.org/2018/03/22/sequencing-ceasefires/>)



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/22/SEQUENCING-](http://www.politicalsettlements.org/2018/03/22/sequencing-ceasefires/)

Click here to read and download Rob's full briefing paper, *Quick Guide to Ceasefire Arrangements*.

(<http://www.politicalsettlements.org/publications-database/psrp-pa-x-rapid-reaction-paper-quick-guide-to-ceasefire-arrangements/>)

For those in the midst of conflict zones, the announcement of a ceasefire is a moment of hope. Hope for reprieve and an opportunity for renewed dialogue. Ceasefires agreements – whether truces, cessation of hostilities, or armistices – suspend hostilities (https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2318980) between conflict parties allowing a temporary reprieve to allow for mutual concessions on the front line.

In contemporary conflicts in Syria and Yemen, the announcement of a ceasefire has regularly preceded attempts at political negotiations between conflict parties. In this context, ceasefires serve to signal commitment (<https://press.princeton.edu/titles/7763.html>) to a political talks by the conflict parties. Additionally, news of military escalation during the course of negotiation is likely to harden resolve among delegates. The second round of Yemen's peace talks in December 2015 ended swiftly (<http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/behind-scenes-yemens-peace-talks-switzerland-506308571>) following an escalation in fighting and casualties.

In **inter**-state conflicts, the Hague Conventions of 1907 firmly underpin the status of truces and armistices in international law. But in **intra**-state conflicts, the nomenclature of ceasefires becomes much more tenuous as does their legal status (<https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwis-tzgvuzZAhWOzqQKH7gAP0QFggoMAA&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jstor.org%2Fstable%2F3651152&usg=AOvVaw1CBA7dzxtmV-5hpK7Nk35d>).

1. Trends in Ceasefire Agreements

When reading ceasefire agreements, what strikes you first is the similarity in their content. Amongst the 1518 peace agreements issued between 1990 and 2015, the recently launched Peace Agreement Access Tool (PA-X) contains 267 ceasefire agreements (https://peaceagreements.org/searchadv?SearchForm%5Bname%5D=&SearchForm%5Bdate_after%5D=&SearchForm%5Bdate_before%5D=&SearchForm%5Bcategory_mode%5D=any&SearchForm%5Bagreement_text%5D=&SearchForm%5Bagreement_stage_sub%5D%5B%5D=Ceasefire%2Frelated&s=Search+Database). Each of these ceasefire agreements are coded qualitatively over 200+ categories. It is further possible to export a spreadsheet (https://peaceagreements.org/searchadv?SearchForm%5Bname%5D=&SearchForm%5Bdate_after%5D=&SearchForm%5Bdate_before%5D=&SearchForm%5Bcategory_mode%5D=any&SearchForm%5Bagreement_text%5D=&SearchForm%5Bagreement_stage_sub%5D%5B%5D=Ceasefire%2Frelated&s=Search+Database) showing a binary indicator of whether a category was included or not, as well as a scale of 1-3 (with 3 being the strongest) indicating the 'strength' of that provision. By crunching the numbers, it is straight forward to find out what items are most prevalent in ceasefire agreements.

Perhaps not surprisingly, these fall broadly into the following categories:

- security provisions;
- humanitarian needs; and
- mechanisms for mitigating an escalation of conflict.

Security provisions within ceasefires fall primarily into what constitutes ceasefire violations and the modalities of how

Humanitarian provisions, on the other hand, are included regularly as confidence-building mechanisms, as well as a response to local needs. The most common items included are: refugee return or the evacuation of internally displaced people (IDPs) and wounded; access to humanitarian aid; the need for reconstruction efforts; and prisoner release.

The final category, avoiding conflict escalation, focuses primarily on two items. The first is reforming the media environment to allow for independent platforms as well as ending media hostilities. The second is the structure and mandate of monitoring and verification mechanisms (MVM).

These items are found in a great number of variations and are increasingly found in ceasefires between non-state groups. For example, in Yemen, the Minutes of Agreement (<https://yemensaeed.net/news12699.html>) signed in January 2014 between the Houthis and the occupants of the Dar al-Hadith Islamic Center in Dammaj under the auspices of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi's Government provide for:

- a ceasefire across the areas of Dammaj, Haradh, Khiwan and Danan;
- the opening of roads;
- access to food and goods, except for the support of combat operations;
- an end to the looting of local artefacts by both sides;
- mutual prisoner release;
- a return of items taken at checkpoints;
- the withdrawal of non-local combatants;
- as well as the creation of implementation committees affiliated with the tribes, the executive and the legislature

2. Sequencing Ceasefires

This is all well and good, but ceasefire agreements have a high rate of failure (<https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-10-20/why-broken-ceasefires-are-not-all-bad>). Despite a huge variety in ceasefire monitoring and verification mechanisms, even the strongest of them are unlikely at times to incentivise commitment, despite international pressure and other means.

The exclusion of political concessions from the negotiation process may bring an end to outright conflict. But, as ceasefires from the Abkhazia process (https://peaceagreements.org/searchadv?SearchForm%5Bcountry_entity%5D%5B%5D=2&SearchForm%5Bname%5D=&SearchForm%5Bdate_after%5D=&SearchForm%5Bdate_before%5D=&SearchForm%5Bcategory_mode%5D=any&SearchForm%5Bagreement_text%5D=&SearchForm%5Bagreement_stage_sub%5D%5B%5D=Ceasefire%2Frelated&s=Search+Database) indicate, a lack of political concessions may extend the phenomenon of 'frozen conflicts'.

Overcoming commitment problems, i.e. the incentive to defect in return for a better deal in the future, may well require greater political concessions and human rights guarantees, either in the ceasefire or in an agreement negotiated in tandem.

Such trends are evident in the ceasefires negotiated in Myanmar (https://peaceagreements.org/searchadv?SearchForm%5Bcountry_entity%5D%5B%5D=92&SearchForm%5Bname%5D=&SearchForm%5Bdate_after%5D=&SearchForm%5Bdate_before%5D=&SearchForm%5Bcategory_mode%5D=any&SearchForm%5Bagreement_text%5D=&SearchForm%5Bagreement_stage_sub%5D%5B%5D=Ceasefire%2Frelated&

%2Fwww.swisspeace.ch%2Ffileadmin%2Fuser_upload%2FMedia%2FPublications%2FCatalyzing_Reflections_2_2014_online.pdf&usg=AOvVaw00_B_FSKDctpanp3Fm2LCU)). Additionally, other processes in Guatemala (https://peaceagreements.org/searchadv?SearchForm%5Bcountry_entity%5D%5B%5D=56&SearchForm%5Bname%5D=&SearchForm%5Bdate_after%5D=&SearchForm%5Bdate_before%5D=&SearchForm%5Bcategory_mode%5D=any&SearchForm%5Bagreement_text%5D=&s=Search+Database) and Colombia (https://peaceagreements.org/searchadv?SearchForm%5Bcountry_entity%5D%5B%5D=32&SearchForm%5Bname%5D=&SearchForm%5Bdate_after%5D=01%2F01%2F2012&SearchForm%5Bdate_before%5D=&SearchForm%5Bcategory_mode%5D=any&SearchForm%5Bagreement_text%5D=&s=Search+Database) highlight the positive role that human rights guarantees and political concessions can play before arriving at a ceasefire.

3. Furthering Research on Ceasefires

As noted above, ceasefires can be a prelude to more robust negotiations and signal commitment from the conflict parties to ending hostilities.

This has worked particularly when a ceasefire is a necessary part of the process. For example, when instituting interim governance arrangements creating so-called Unity Governments, a ceasefire is necessary to avoid incentivising the creation of parallel institutions by merging rebel and government forces, and implementing effective disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR).

Nonetheless, ceasefire agreements will not hold unless there is sufficient reason for them holding. The promise of talks – as indicated in Syria and Yemen – is not always enough. The design of the peace process and the items for discussion will influence whether parties have sufficient motivation to maintain the ceasefire.

More research needs to be undertaken in this regard.